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Staten Island Chamber of
Commerce

Report of the Ferry
Committee of the...

[Staten Island, N.Y.]

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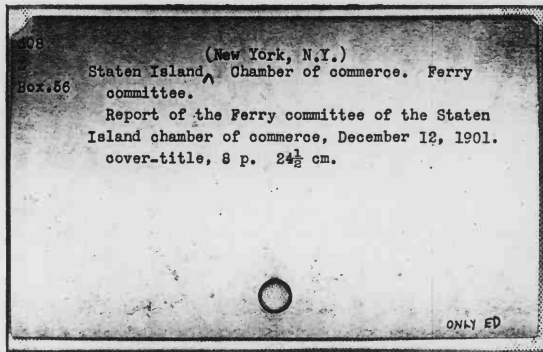
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REPORT
OF THE
FERRY COMMITTEE
OF THE
STATEN ISLAND
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

DECEMBER 12, 1901

308

2

Page 56

**REPORT
OF THE
FERRY COMMITTEE
OF THE
STATEN ISLAND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
DECEMBER 12, 1901**

On the 24th day of June last, shortly after the disaster to the ferry boat Northfield, your directors, thinking it an auspicious time to again take up the ferry question in its various relations to the welfare and convenience of the inhabitants of the Boroughs of Richmond and Manhattan, appointed the Committee which now has the honor of reporting to you.

The subject was limited to "ferry" investigation that being the feature of immediate possibilities; though discussion of future means between Manhattan and Richmond may very advisably cover other methods of access as well.

Not unnaturally, under the pressure and sorrow of the time, many citizens desired an early report and one condemnatory of all existing conditions.

Your committee, though appreciating to the full the horror of the accident, felt that a quiet, thorough examination, and a carefully considered conservative report, would be more in keeping with the real needs of the case and of greater advantage to the community if presented when the special excitement had passed away.

As to the accident itself, it was evident that the courts would take all necessary action, so we have omitted further reference to it in this report.

On April 25th, 1899, a special committee of the Chamber ably reported on the ferry question, showing very completely the great lack of proper facilities, so that on the points covered then, your present committee has in a large measure, but to reiterate the former conclusions and to agree with them; that the service as rendered is so inadequate to the needs of the Island, as to be a very serious handicap to its prosperity and growth.

When the former committee reported, we hoped that the City Administration, then but about a year in power under the Greater New York consolidation, would bring order out of chaos and take up the matter of improved transportation between Manhattan and Richmond, as it had promised to do; but our hopes have had no realization.

That administration is now about to be superseded by a new one; shall we, through not asking for what we want, let it also pass away without relieving our needs, if by asking and urging and pushing and keeping everlastingly at it, the desired results can be accomplished?

In order to be perfectly fair, we sought and had an interview with the managers of the ferry company to learn any plans they might propose for bettering the conditions, or what reasons they had for not

complying with suitable suggestions from Staten Islanders and others interested.

While they were courteous and perhaps more freely communicative than in the past, but little that is new was really learned; their statements being confined to or rather crystalized into, two claims.

First.—That without an extension of franchise, no new capital could be enlisted; hence no new boats could be put into service; that said extension had been formally requested of the proper city officials, but had been completely ignored.

Note.—Since above was written this matter has been taken up and the petition refused by the officials in power.

Second.—That the seven years of operation under the present franchise had been years of loss instead of profit.

As to the first, the company would not promise any further improvements if its franchise should be extended; though it recognized and admitted that the best opportunity for profit would be in giving good, up-to-date service.

As to the second, it is hard to guesstimate figures given apparently fully and in good faith; but careful estimates of ferry expenses, after making full allowances for franchise payments, rentals, taxes, insurance, interest on bonds, sinking fund, repairs and operation, would seem to show that there should be a balance for profit out of the receipts actually sworn to in reports to the city.

It is not essential that your committee should try to reconcile these apparently conflicting conditions. We simply present them.

Under the Revised Charter of the City of New York, the Commissioner of Docks has power to lease the franchise of any ferry belonging to the city for a term not

longer than twenty-five years, with a renewal for a term not longer than ten years; and he also has the power to lease with said franchise such wharf property including slips, water fronts, etc., as are now owned or may hereafter be acquired by said city; and leases of such franchise so made, may, in the discretion of the commissioner of docks and the commissioners of the sinking fund, provide for the character of transportation, service to be furnished by the lessee, including the character and speed of the boats to be used, frequency of trips, rates of fare and commutation, and freight charges, and may provide for forfeiture of the lease in the event of failure to comply with its provisions in regard thereto.

It is also provided by said charter that "whenever it may be determined by the unanimous vote of the commissioners of the sinking fund, upon the recommendation of the commissioner of docks, that the interests of the city will not be best promoted by leasing the franchise of a ferry" at public auction or by sealed bids, after advertisement and appraisal "it shall be lawful for said commissioner of docks and said commissioners of the sinking fund, by resolutions adopted by such unanimous votes, to lease such franchises by private agreement for terms not exceeding twenty-five years and under such conditions as in their judgment will best protect and further the interests of the city and the traveling public."

The charter also gives very full power for municipal acquisition of the water front properties, which may be useful for establishing new points for ferry service.

Such acquisitions in Richmond should be urged so that when a ferry franchise is offered for sale, terminals at both ends may be included.

With these foregoing powers

available we have four things to do:

First.—To demonstrate to the authorities the need for additional and improved service.

Second.—To apply to the proper ones for the franchises desired.

Third.—To see to it that the new lease shall contain suitable provisions for protecting and benefiting the Borough of Richmond.

Fourth.—To present one or more reliable parties, who will agree to bid for such franchises and bind themselves to maintain such contemplated ferries for a definite term of years.

The Manhattan terminal is, in some respects, all that can be desired; as to location, admirable; as to arrangement, convenient; as to maintenance, satisfactory, except that no over-head landing facilities are as yet provided.

The leasing of one of the slips for boats to Communipaw, thus depriving the Staten Island ferry of such use during rush hours, is very unwise; for, though it may be a convenience to a few going to points on the lines of the Central R. R. of New Jersey or the Baltimore & Ohio R. R., it now causes delay at certain hours to hundreds or even thousands of Staten Islanders and will in the future still further hamper any more frequent service.

It is well known that there has been more than talk about the city's granting a regular franchise for this route (now being actually operated as a ferry without consent). If such a franchise is granted, the blow to our ferry will be damaging beyond measure.

The Baltimore & Ohio R. R. has advertised its so-called "Whitehall Terminal" very widely along its lines; still very few of its patrons make use of the facilities—and local passengers to Communipaw or other near-by points rarely do so.

Now that the Pennsylvania R. R. has acquired control of the Baltimore & Ohio R. R. we do not know what developments may come, but cannot believe that its progressive management would seek to endanger a ferry service to Staten Island where logically its interests should soon predominate, and where, suspicions of its good influence have been already felt.

It should be noted that nearly every ferry of importance along Manhattan's water front possesses and uses at least two slips, while from every direction, except from Staten Island, several ferries supply the service needed.

At the Staten Island end, for some purposes the concentration at one point is of decided advantage. As a quick means for gathering and distributing passengers, it is probably preferable to a scattered system, provided speedy passenger boats are used and sufficient trains and cars supplied, but for team and freight business, with the physical handicap of hills and long contracted approaches, it could not well be worse. With "along-shore" passenger service to the more distant points, some additional convenience could now be secured; but the saving of time and wear and tear on wagons, horses and roads by such service for teams and freight, to points near which much of the traffic comes from, would be very considerable. Certain trips of such boats to points north of Cortlandt street and east of Wall street in Manhattan would be a special boon for heavy trucking and relieve some of the congestion now evident in the southern end of Manhattan.

As the population increases these changes will ultimately be found absolutely necessary.

The transportation lines of Richmond would also benefit by securing "short haul" traffic instead of

17
M B N June 26, 19

"long haul", with consequently less crowding and inconvenience to their passengers.

The acquisition of the Richmond terminals by the city and leasing the same to such company as may secure the new franchise would also be well advised.

The population of Richmond Borough has increased steadily in spite of these particular disadvantages, but many have moved away who were not tied down by ownership of property, or who preferred to sacrifice such ownership and go to suburbs of New York, less desirable in natural conditions, rather than submit to the inconvenience and discomfort of the ferry service as compared with the advantages of other places.

The natural charms and pleasures of Staten Island must indeed be great to stand it, for to them must be credited the growth that has taken place.

Yet, in all fairness for what it does do, it must be said that no ferry in or about New York has been more prompt and regular in ice and fog; has carried its passengers with fewer accidents, or has better, more efficient and courteous employees.

However, three boats of about 40 years of age, one of over 20 and two of 15 years or more, are not qualified, even if kept painted, repaired and overhauled, for the duty of the present day. The annual expenditure for insurance, repairs and renewals when a boat passes 20 years of age will go a long way towards interest and sinking fund on the expense of a new boat, and a word of praise from a satisfied public will go a very long way towards increasing the company's business, while the constant fretting of dissatisfied people (and properly dissatisfied at that) must necessarily seriously injure it.

It is not the wish or intention of

your committee to attack any corporate interest for the sake of injuring it, but just criticism is our duty. While we believe that with the boats at its disposal the present company has maintained as good service as it was able to do, yet there is no question that, years ago, the three oldest boats should have been relegated to honorable retirement and new speedy steamers have been placed in service to maintain regular twenty minute schedule trips instead of the old ones trying to attain twenty-five minute runs and averaging nearer thirty.

As to the older boats themselves, the government inspectors declare them sound and seaworthy, but the cabins are ill ventilated and insufficiently lighted, both by day and night; the sanitary conveniences are simply abominable and the three old boats are far too small for the service required at rush hours.

The elimination in large measure of team and freight service from the ferry to St. George would make more possible, speedy boats of the full passenger carrying capacity of the Robert Garrett and Castleton, yet of a very greatly lessened size and cost.

The service of the S. I. Electric R. R. Co. in bringing passengers to and taking them from St. George is fair and will probably be still improved when the new power station comes into full operation, but the convenience of passengers wishing to travel on the cars of the Midland R. R. has been altogether ignored.

The Rapid Transit or steam line has decided room for improvement in many respects; some of them your committee notes with pleasure are receiving attention, so that it may not be necessary to go particularly into that phase of the subject at this time.

The special question of interest, however, growing out of this dis-

tribution service is the one of fares. Nearly fifty years ago passengers were carried by boat to the North and East shores for \$30 a year; now to the same points over \$60 is charged; then or shortly afterward 15 tickets were sold for one dollar. Later, prior to the concentration at St. George, 11 tickets were sold for one dollar, and half fare charged for children, school boys and working people receiving less than a certain fixed sum per week. With the inauguration of the Rapid Transit or concentration system and up to June, 1894, a similar method prevailed, with, in addition, a commutation book plan which made the fare from New York to St. George or any point on the North or East shores and vice versa about 6 1-2 cents per trip, or about 3 1-4c. for the boat ride. With present franchises secured by outside parties (at once sub-leased to the old operators of the ferry) all commutation or other reduced rates were abolished and the full charge of 5c. per trip was established for the ferry, for the electric cars and for the Rapid Transit; or 10c. for the old commuter from and to every point except St. George, as against about 6 1-2c. before, an increase of over 50 per cent.; and 10c., as against 5c. for the child, student and low-paid work girl—an increase of 100 per cent. A few living within walking distance of St. George were benefited; but the vast majority were hurt and in many cases positive suffering was entailed.

This resume is given to show how in the passing of years this operating company has increased the transportation rates, instead of following the trend of progressive organizations in decreasing them.

A point often raised by the company is the dock rental for the Manhattan terminal of something over \$21,000 and the franchise tax of

5 1-2 per cent. on the gross receipts. The former is probably not excessive for the best dockage point on New York's water front; the second certainly does seem to be too high a rate, when we note that the city has only recently been considering with favor a contract with Brooklyn ferries at but 3 per cent. of the gross receipts; and when the city is expending vast sums for free bridges between Manhattan and Brooklyn, The Bronx and Queens, for all of which Richmond pays its share yet gets no benefit.

To the extent of such inequality there is discrimination against Staten Island.

If franchises were granted only on bases of definite rentals and uniform percentages on gross receipts, to the companies that agree under bond to give the best service to the people for the lowest rates for passengers, teams and freight, then there would be no need of such committees as the present.

Towards attaining the conditions that we need, let us look forward and demand for Staten Island from the existing company, if possible, and if not, from its successor or successors, and from the officials of our city as they may have power, the following rights:

First.—The absolute reservation of two slips at the Whitehall terminal for Staten Island business.

Second.—More frequent trips than at present for passengers from St. George to Manhattan and Manhattan to St. George; made in not over 20 minutes average time for each trip, dock to dock.

Third.—New boats, well lighted, well heated, well ventilated; having the hull divided into watertight, non-communicating compartments and equipped with up-to-date sanitary conveniences, kept in cleanly condition.

Fourth.—Life preservers, life

boats and rafts in sufficient number to accommodate, not the average number of passengers that the law now requires, but the maximum.

Fifth.—Landings from the upper decks at both ends of the ferry, so as to connect with elevated service in Manhattan and the electric and footbridge service on Staten Island.

Sixth.—Quicker acting and less clumsy tying up devices at the landings, with broader exits from the boats, which should be shaped to fit the bridge thus eliminating gang planks.

Seventh.—Commutation or reduced fares at rates as favorable as those on other suburban lines.

Eighth.—Additional ferry boats making landings on the north and east shores of Staten Island, running at frequent intervals, for passenger traffic particularly; but carrying passengers also if they desire to go; rates for all such traffic to be as low relatively as on other ferries running to points on the west and east sides of Manhattan.

Ninth.—If the city can provide in Manhattan adequate landing places, certain trips of these "along shore" boats to run to suitable points on the North and East Rivers.

Tenth.—To request the city authorities to acquire by purchase or condemnation suitable landing places on Staten Island, necessary for such improved ferry facilities as are herein suggested.

Eleventh.—To insure the continuance and even improvement of the ferry facilities and provide for changing conditions, the securing of some method by which the citizens of Richmond and Manhattan when they feel that the facilities are inadequate can appeal for relief to some official or officials, who shall be given discretion and power to order such changes as might seem to be necessary.

Twelfth.—To facilitate the financing of such ferry companies, the franchise grants covering the foregoing requirements should be for twenty or twenty-five years and be made at least one year before termination of the old franchise, to permit of new parties making adequate provision for necessary boats.

Respectfully submitted,

LOUIS L. TRIBUS.

CHAS. W. HUNT.

ALBERT E. HADLOCK.

Special Committee of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce.

Dec. 12, 1901.

EXTRACT FROM THE SECRETARY'S REPORT

December 19, 1901

The improvement of the Kill von Kull and Staten Island Sound and the deepening of the channel along these water ways is again claiming the attention of the Joint Water Ways Committee, which had secured an appropriation of \$696,000 in the last River and Harbor bill, which, as is well known, was defeated by the Senator from Montana during the closing moments of the last Congress.

The Chairman of the Joint Water Ways Committee has recently been in Washington and it is confidently expected that the improvements asked for will again be inserted in the River and Harbor bill, as Congressman Burton, of Ohio, who is fully familiar with the requirements of this improvement has again been selected as the Chairman of the River and Harbor Committee of the House.

A matter of the utmost importance and requiring the attention not only of this Chamber, but the owners of water fronts along the Kill von Kull, is the application now

pending before the Riparian Commission of New Jersey for an extension of the pier head line along the New Jersey shore of the Kill von Kull. This channel has, from time to time, been encroached upon by an extension of the pier head lines in New Jersey until it has been narrowed down to dimensions which make navigation on the Kill von Kull extremely difficult. Besides this, the extension of the pier head line on the Jersey side has resulted in crowding the pier head line on the Staten Island side of the Kill von Kull to a margin along the shore which is so narrow as to seriously limit its usefulness for business and manufacturing purposes.

The attention of property owners and others interested in the navigation of the Kill von Kull has been drawn to this subject by order of your Board of Directors and a meeting for the discussion of the subject called for to-morrow (Friday) night at the office of Mr. Henry J. Creighton, corner of Wall street and Jay street, St. George; which meeting it is hoped will be attended by any members of this Chamber and others interested in the subject.

At the meeting of the Directors held December 13th, the following resolution on this subject was passed and the Secretary has notified the Richmond Borough Board, the Department of Docks and Ferries, the Secretary of War and the Riparian Commission of New Jersey, of the nature of this resolution.

Whereas, it appears that an effort is being made by certain corporate interests doing business on the shores of the Kill von Kull in New Jersey, to have the present pier head line along the Kill von Kull extended, and

Whereas, the proposed encroachment on this already narrow water way would be detrimental to the in-

terests of navigation on the Kill von Kull, over which more than one hundred and seventy million (\$170,000,000) dollars' worth of merchandise passes every year, and

Whereas, the values of property along the Staten Island shores would be seriously affected,

Now therefore be it Resolved, that the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce protests against such extension and urges that the application for an extension of the pier head line of the New Jersey shores be denied, and

Be it further Resolved, that the Secretary of this Chamber send a copy of this resolution to the Department of Docks of the City of New York, to the Secretary of War and to the Riparian Commission of New Jersey.

The Riparian Commission of New Jersey has acknowledged receipt of the communication and has notified the Secretary that they will be glad to grant a hearing to members of this Chamber at a meeting of the Commission to be held at the office of the Commission in Jersey City at 11 o'clock, Thursday, December 26th.

Numerous letters endorsing the action of the Chamber in protesting against an extension of the pier head line on the Jersey shore have been received.

Your Secretary further desires to report that in view of the fact that the Municipal Council of the City of New York passed a resolution granting a franchise to the Central Railroad of New Jersey for the occupancy of one of the slips now used by the Staten Island Ferry Company, a committee consisting of President Irving, Vice-President L. L. Tribus and your Secretary yesterday called on Mayor Van Wyck and drew his attention to the fact that the diverting of this slip to the uses of a ferry between Whitehall street and Communipaw

would seriously affect the ferry traffic between Staten Island and New York for the reason that the growing traffic demands the use of both of these slips.

The Mayor's attention was also drawn to the fact that the sinking of the ferry boat Northfield by the Mauch Chunk was due in a large measure to the fact that the slip above referred to was being used for the ferry to Communipaw, which in leaving and entering its slip, is obliged to cross the bow of the Staten Island ferry boats leaving the adjoining slip.

Mayor Van Wyck gave your committee a very kind reception and promised that no action would be taken in the premises by way of a confirmation of the franchise without giving this Chamber a hearing on the subject.

A visit with the same purpose in view was also made to the Department of Docks and Ferries by your Committee and the assurance given them that nothing would be done by this Board without also giving this Chamber a hearing.

At a meeting of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce held at the First National Bank Building December 19, 1901, the above report was approved and adopted, and the Secretary ordered to have 5,000 copies of the same printed and properly distributed on Staten Island.

At this meeting it was further resolved that the President appoint a committee whose duty it should be to incorporate the report in a petition to be presented to the authori-

ties of the City of New York, asking for the improvements mentioned and for such other improvements as may be deemed necessary from time to time.

This committee was also directed to secure from the members of this Chamber and other associations as well as from representative citizens of Staten Island and New York, pledges to appear at hearings and meetings and to co-operate with the committee in support of the measures and improvements recommended in the report.

On the 31st day of December, 1901, President Gugy AE. Irving appointed on this committee Messrs. Louis L. Tribus, Albert E. Hadlock and David J. Tysen.

These gentlemen having expressed their willingness to serve the committee is now constituted as above.

On Dec. 20th, 1901, a meeting of owners of water fronts on the Kill von Kull was held at Mr. Creighton's office when it was decided to appear before the Riparian Commission of New Jersey in opposition to the proposed extension of the pier head line on the New Jersey shores of the Kill von Kull.

On Dec. 26th a delegation of members of this Chamber and property owners appeared before the Riparian Commission in Jersey City and there protested against the said extension of the pier head line in New Jersey.

Respectfully submitted,
CORNELIUS G. KOLFF.

December 31, 1901.

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